

James

Bible Commentary 2021

by

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Introduction

James reminds me of Proverbs. Thoughts go from one to another quickly. In the first chapter he covered several principles of life. Like Proverbs it presents us with practical knowledge for daily living. He took it for granted he was speaking to believers.

The first item is patience during trials. There is a reason we rejoice during trials. God is at work in allowing hardship. He allows it for spiritual growth in the life of the believer. The goal is for us to become "*complete and entire, lacking nothing*". This is the way to get dressed in the full armor of God. This is the way our character is refined and we are made into a vessel of honor, fit for the master's use, and prepared to every good work.

James went down an entire list of virtues. It might be difficult on first reading to see how these virtues fit together, but by meditating on this scripture a tapestry of daily Christian life emerges. We see the boundary stones for the spiritual Christian life and what that should look like.

James was not teaching us how to become Christians or how to grow as a Christians. Instead, he taught us what a growing Christian looks like from the outside. Here we see a picture of the overcoming Christian in action.

We see joy, patience, wisdom, faith, endurance, and piety all within the first chapter. As we proceed the subject of speech is covered in a section dealing with taming the tongue. Paul also touched on speech in his letters. Our speech should be filled with grace and seasoned with salt. What we say is the direct result of what we stored up in our heart according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus.

Another theme running through James is the poor and the rich. The poor Christian is exalted but the rich is warned that his station of wealth will quickly fade away. He also has strong rebuke and warning for those who are rich. He warned them that God's judgment of fire will consume their riches.

The emphasis from beginning to end is on eternity which is completely opposite of what you hear coming from pulpits in America today. We have strayed far away from the doctrine of the apostles. I can only hope and pray for a revival of the basic truths of God's word in my lifetime.

Chapter 1

1:1-4

I'm glad James began with a word about joy. At the heart of being a Christian is a joy unspeakable and full of glory. There is joy in the Lord which nothing in this world can give. There is no joy like the joy of knowing you will live forever with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This joy is not the happiness people derive from consuming what the world offers. It is not something which comes by stimulating the senses or indulging in the lust of the flesh. This is another joy, one which comes from deep down on the inside and permeates the heart, the mind, the will, and can also affect the body of a man as well. It is a deep well and the water is pure and clean.

We have a promise of eternal joy before us. Believers will one day no longer be burdened by the sorrows of this life. Read **Isaiah 51:11**. Until that day, however, we still stand on God's word, and enter God's rest by faith in Jesus Christ, and experience the joy of the Lord by faith. **Philippians 4:4**.

Don't allow the enemy to keep you down for long. Don't allow discouragement, depression, or disappointment to take hold on your soul or make your face change into a permanent frown.

Instead, choose today to believe in the Lord, to believe in God's promises, and to be strong in faith. **Romans 4:20**.

Choose this day to stand in faith, no matter what our emotions, or what the circumstances look like. Walk by faith no matter what the world tells us. Lift up the shield of faith against the fiery darts of unbelief, fear, and doubt.

Above all else guard your heart for this is the wellspring of life. Our lives flow from the faith in our hearts. Guard your heart and do not allow unbelief, doubt, and fear to take root.

Meditate on God's word and God's promises. Repent and turn to God with all your heart. Pray God will revive us again.

Joy does not come without suffering. Though weeping may remain through the night, joy comes in the morning. Joy comes as we endure with patience the situation God has marked out for us. As we endure and overcome by faith then when God changes the situation we will know we learned our lesson and were changed into the likeness of Christ through it. We must grasp the purpose God has for us in going through various trials. There is much comfort knowing there is meaning in trials.

James plainly tells us God's purpose in our trials: so we can be made whole.

The Bible says foolishness is bound in the heart of a child. When we are born into this world we are born wayward, bent, and broken. It takes our parent's disciplining us and also God's discipline throughout our lives to remove the foolishness from our hearts.

Beyond removing what is wrong God also puts something in us which reflects the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are a reflection of God's glory in Christ Jesus.

Trials can speed up this process if we walk by faith during the wilderness experience. Otherwise, we prolong our wilderness experience if we grumble or complain like Israel did.

God wrote down these examples of Israel as a lesson to us so that we would not follow their example. Instead, we should give thanks in everything.

Why? Because thanks shows faith in God's goodness, his control in our lives, and our decision to believe everything in our lives is material for God to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. Read **Romans 8:28-29**.

Read **Hebrews 5:8**. What we experience as suffering is a tool in God's hand to teach us obedience so we can be like Jesus. Is the goal of your life to be more like Jesus every day? If so, then make a decision to reject any thought of discouragement, depression, or giving up. Reject any thought of despair and instead rejoice. God is at work in our lives to make us like his Son Jesus.

Our need is not to escape trials but our need is to be changed by trials into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Surrender to the Lord and simply believe his word. Let God take care of it. He will work it out for us.

God will not damage you. You will not be damaged by the process of change. While you are in the process of transformation you will suffer no permanent damage.

If you are marked by pain then learn to bear those scars with joy as Paul did. Paul used his scars as leverage to preach the gospel with authority.

1:5-8

It takes wisdom from God to see value in trials. It takes revelation from the Lord to appreciate the importance of walking by faith in testing. When we are in the wilderness we look up to the Lord by faith. We remember the word of God and his promises. This is why we walk in the wilderness and hunger.

Read **Deuteronomy 8:3**. God's word is more precious than happiness. Our will is brought into submission to God's word while we are in the wilderness. We learn obedience to God, just like Jesus, through suffering in the wilderness.

The wilderness experience eventually comes to an end. It comes to an end when you are ready to fight the giants. Don't pray for the wilderness to end until you are ready to face the battle against giants.

When we ask God for wisdom it is so we can appreciate each step we take in the wilderness and to truly extract each lesson we should learn there. There is nothing wrong in praying for the trial to be over but pray we learn all we should while in the furnace so we don't have to repeat the process again.

I've noticed I go through the same trials. Finally I realized it is better to suffer now and learn my lesson and let God lead me through it rather than take shortcuts.

Walking by faith means we cannot allow depression, discouragement, or unbelief to take hold. One way you can tell unbelief is taking hold is when you hear God's word and it bounces off. It doesn't make any difference. You don't feel encouraged by God's promises. When you are in this condition the best thing to do is humble yourself and repent of unbelief. Stay on your knees until God gives you victory over unbelief.

Pray for wisdom and don't pray with unbelief in your heart. **Hebrews 11:6**, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*

What exactly is a double-minded man? This is a man who professes to be a Christian but lives contrary to the word of God. His life is controlled by fear and unbelief in everyday living. He has no courage to face the unknown. He always retraces his steps instead of going boldly into what God has for him out front.

I know this because I've been the man who was a coward. I pray God burned it all out of me and I will walk with my face like a flint towards the future God has for me, not looking back, forgetting those things which are behind me.

Pray for wisdom and ask with faith that God will show you what you need to know in order to learn your lesson. God is taking you somewhere, and it is up to you to believe he loves you and has a good plan for you. No matter how bad your present circumstances are the Lord has a good plan for you. Your best days are still in front of you.

1:9-11

In James we read about a completely different attitude toward the poor and the rich than what we see promoted in popular American churches. The attitude we see in James is the same attitude Jesus had. Jesus clearly stated the gospel was preached to the poor. He said it was difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

What can we conclude from these words? The same conclusion Paul came to in **1 Timothy 6:9-10**.

Do we see how God elevates the poor man? Why is it the poor man is elevated? Because the poor naturally have a quality which God is most attracted to: humility! A poor man is more apt to humility and more willing to humble his heart. A rich man will fade away because of the pride which goes with all of that money, position, and power. All of that worldly power is fading away as soon as he has it in his hands. It sprouts wings and flies away.

Let us not waste our lives chasing after money. Instead, let us determine to obey **Matthew 6:33**.

1:12

There is no escaping temptation while we are in this fallen world. Even the Lord Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. He overcame every temptation and did not sin. **Hebrews 4:15**.

We do not put ourselves near temptation or look for it. However, we are guaranteed sooner or later the enemy or our carnal nature will bring us into a temptation.

Sin is when we do what we want regardless of what God says. It is living for self first and not living for Christ. It is missing the mark and the mark is God's perfection. The law of God shows us the mark, and Jesus is the express image of God. When we compare ourselves to Jesus we will come up short. (**Romans 3:23**).

Here we read that God does not tempt man to commit sin but we are tempted when led away by our own lusts and enticed. When we are tempted God makes a way for us to escape and overcome if we look for escape. **1 Corinthians 10:13**.

In **James 1:12** we find the highest motivation one can possibly have for enduring any temptation. This motivation is our love for the Lord Jesus. Also, this scripture is a promise from God: we will receive a crown of life for enduring temptation.

With this in mind let us pray the Lord will give us a hatred of sin, a love for righteousness, and let our hearts be filled with an intense love for the Lord Jesus. It is this love which gives us the power to endure and overcome the temptation of the enemy.

1:13-16

When we get in trouble we usually want to blame others and point the finger at anyone except ourselves as the problem. We are terrible at taking personal responsibility for our actions. However, in my experience, the first step toward correcting a problem is to own it.

This scripture teaches us that it is not God's fault when we fall into sin, but it is our own personal responsibility. We have to admit that we are wrong, and that God is right. This is basic, and unless we are willing to humble ourselves and admit we are wrong we cannot proceed any further.

Notice this verse also shows us that there is a definite progression with temptation, lust, enticement, sin, and then death. The wages of sin is always death, no matter where we may be on this progressive spectrum and downward spiral.

The only way to escape this free fall of sin is to own up to our personal responsibility. Humility on our part enables God to intervene on our behalf with his grace. God gives grace to the humble, but he resists the proud. He delivers those who call upon his name in humility.

Let us pray we will have a love for the truth, even when the truth condemns us. Let us bow our knees before the Lord Jesus Christ, and trust in the love of our heavenly Father to cleanse us, purify us, and make us whole.

1:17-18

Everything good in my life came from God. I did not create anything that is good in my life. It is human nature to think we create our own good luck or good fortune or that we build success in our

lives by following the rules and being persistent. Following the rules is good but real success and good things come from God alone.

What does this tell us about the character of God? He does not change. There is no shadow of turning with God. Once you know who the Lord is you can be assured that he will not change tomorrow. When God says he loves you he does not change his mind. When God does something good in your life he never takes it back.

The greatest thing the Lord ever did in my life was opening the eyes of my heart so that I can truly see that the Lord Jesus is real and loves me and died on the cross in my place. The Lord Jesus died for me at Calvary, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. His Holy Spirit lives in me, and his presence goes with us. He will never leave us, and he will never forsake us.

Notice that it is God's word of truth that gives us new life. We were begotten. We were given new life through the resurrection power of the word of truth. There is a goal in God's work in giving us new life. It is so we can be a first fruits of his creation.

God's word gives us life. When people reject God's word they are in reality rejecting eternal life. Men prefer spiritual death. This shocks me to think about. We would prefer to figure out everything for ourselves instead of believing the truth in God's word. Pride, arrogance, unbelief, and rejection of the truth. This is human nature. But God's word gives us eternal life. When we believe the gospel then we are born again. We receive a new kind of life within us, it is the very life of God, the Holy Spirit. He makes us unto a new creature in Christ Jesus. Old things are passed away, and all things become new.

The Lord is good. He is always good. He is good to all. His goodness will never change. He will always be a good God, who loves us, and gives us everything that is good for life and godliness.

1:19-21

There is a place for anger in the Christian life. It is a normal emotion which God created and which he feels. Jesus demonstrated his anger when he made a whip of cords and drove the money changers out of the temple. The Bible says that Jesus was angry at the hard hearts of the Pharisees. Paul comments on anger in **Ephesians 4:26**.

The wrath of man is self-centered and is based on injury or injustice done to the individual. In this case we are always commanded to forgive those who transgress us. We are to leave room for God to take care of those who sin against us. Read **Romans 12:19-21**.

In the epistle of James we have some tools for short circuiting wrath when it tries to rise up in our hearts. The first tool is to listen carefully. Don't just listen long enough to come up with a self-defense or argument. Listen carefully. Truly hear what the other person is saying. Put yourself in their shoes. Try very carefully to think through their position and what they are saying. This is easier said than done because human nature wants to jump to its own defense and fight. We must suppress the natural desire to defend ourselves or fight. Instead, we need to listen carefully and think, think, think.

Take time to think before you speak. Again, easier said than done. But it is very important we do not let words start flying out of our mouth that we will regret. We might win an argument with harsh words,

but we will still lose if we lose that person who is attacking us. See, the goal of the Christian is not to vindicate ourselves, but to win others for Christ. We must choose our words carefully. Do not give in to the natural instinct to defend self or vindicate yourself. Leave room for God to take care of that. Sometimes the best thing to do is just to remain quiet and not say anything at all.

Finally, we need to always remember that the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. We will not further the purpose of God by embracing wrath against anyone. Do not give in to the desire of the flesh to defend self or vent all of one's wrath against anyone. It is much better to keep a quiet spirit and speak to God alone about the grief we bear toward anyone.

May the Lord help us this day to listen carefully, be slow to speak, and slow to wrath.

1:22-25

What does it mean to be a doer of the word and not a hearer only? The simplest way for me to understand is this: God's word, mixed with faith, produces definable action. It is productive. God's word is active, it is alive, and it brings forth fruit in the life of the believer.

However, if a man hears the word but does not believe it then it does not produce anything except self deception. A man who attends church and listens to the preaching, but does not believe it will not be changed for the good. This is the danger of being in the presence of God's word and yet refusing to believe the word. Unbelief produces deception and the embrace of lies.

It is easier to be lazy and live in unbelief. It takes thoughtfulness and attention to hear God's word and believe it. Taking God's word into a believing heart will automatically lead to becoming a doer of the word. God's word will not sit passive in the heart of a believer. It will lead to repentance, to humility, and a desire for good works and action. This is the effect it has on the heart of the believer.

As surely as fire burns wood when it is mixed with oxygen and combustion so also a heart mixed with faith and God's word leads to an explosion of reverent works. This does not contradict the foundation of salvation which is a gift from God received by faith alone. **Ephesians 2:8-9.**

There is a danger for intellectuals who hear the word, study the word, categorize, and analyze the word. The danger is getting into a frame of mind where we think that the act of processing the word is an end in itself. It is not. God's word is purposeful and it is not meant to only be talked about and analyzed into systems. The purpose of God's word is to change us and make us living letters for everyone to read.

1:26-27

There may be men in the church who seem to be religious. This is a back handed way of bringing up the thought that there will be people in churches who are not really Christians at all. How can you tell the difference? You might be surprised how much of the New Testament focuses on the difference between true and fake believers. My guess is the majority of people who fill churches have no clue who the Lord Jesus is. They may know facts about God but there is no real personal connection with the Lord.

One way you can discern someone who is a fake Christian or a backslidden Christian is how they control their speech. James repeats this same truth throughout his letter. What a person says in public

reveals a lot of what is in his heart and mind. If someone has no restraint in their speech in public it shows they lack self control. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit, so it follows that someone who lacks self-control is deceived. James says their "religion" is vain. I take this to mean they are not helping anyone with their profession of faith, and indeed, might be hurting the cause of the gospel by claiming to be a Christian but having no control over their tongue.

James went on to teach us what true religion is like. James was not teaching us here how to be saved or to maintain salvation in the life of the believer. He was simply stating what active faith in the true believer looks like to the world outside. A true believer will care about people such as orphans and widows. In other words, a Christian cares about people who cannot help themselves. A widow is someone who is elderly and helpless and no longer has a spouse. In other words they have no family support. In this case, Christians in the church step up to help a person in this situation. Another helpless person category is children who have no parents. Just like a widow without a spouse or family, an orphan is someone who does not have family support or parents. Both of these are examples of situations where Christians step up to help others.

And finally, a true believer in Jesus will strive to rid himself of sin and the influence of the world system. This means putting off the old man, being renewed in the spirit of the mind, and putting on the new man. Simply put, stay in the word, and stay in prayer. Keep your spiritual fire burning every day. Get up and stoke the fire of faith in your heart every morning. Don't let the fire of your faith get cold but continue to feed it with the wood of God's word, with being involved in good works, and staying in fellowship with other believers.

Christ died for our sins. He was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Chapter 2

2:1-4

James stressed the importance of seeing the church the way God sees the church. People in the church are not seen by God according to their outward appearance or according to how much money they have or what their social standing may be. In the church people are equal. People in the church who judge others by financial status are not seeing the church the way God does.

To view brothers and sisters in the church according to worldly standards is to be a judge with evil thoughts. It is evil to judge people by their outward appearance and financial status. Why is this so important?

God's kingdom is radically different from the world system we currently live in. Within the church we should live according to the principles of God's kingdom. The world evaluates a man by how great a name he makes for himself. A man makes a name for himself by how much money he has and what kind of clothes he wears. It is really as simple as that.

Why is this evil? If you have to ask the question then you do not yet discern how evil your own heart is and how evil the world system is.

This world system is based on pride, lust, and covetousness. It is completely opposed to God and God's kingdom. This world system is described in a spiritual sense as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. This is the evil spirit in the world system.

The outward machinery of the world system is government, business, and society. These fit together like a hand in a glove. Man has made this system in agreement with Satan and in agreement with Satan's lies that we can be gods knowing good and evil. Everything in the world system is based on the principles of this lie.

The manifestation of this evil world system in the church is when brothers and sisters judge one another by their appearance or financial status. This judging shows we live just like the world and are just as evil in our thinking as the rest of the world.

God called us out of this Babylonian world system. Our thinking should no longer be like the world system, but instead, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our mind in God's word.

God has called us to put off this old world system and the attitudes which go with it.

Instead, we are to be a new man, like the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved everyone the same. Jesus loved the rich man, and he also loved the lowliest in society. He made no difference in his relationships with people.

If we make a difference in our relationships with people based on position or title then we are no different than the rest of the world. We are not living like Jesus but we are living like the devil when we judge men by outward appearance or social status.

May the Lord help us remember this important truth. Help us to love the church and to see the church the same way the Lord Jesus sees the church.

2:5

Read carefully the words of the Lord Jesus and you will soon find out the villain in his parables and sermons were rich folk in this world. How is it American prosperity and faith teachers get it so backwards from what Jesus plainly said in the New Testament?

There was only one rich man in the gospels who was saved. This man gave away his money to those he cheated. I'm referring to the tax collector Zacchaeus, short of stature, but big in heart.

The teaching of the Lord Jesus and the apostles was simple when it came to the rich and poor. Jesus said the gospel was preached to the "poor". People may attempt to spiritualize this and say that "poor" refers to humility of spirit. Look at these scriptures in context. Many times when the poor are mentioned it is in contrast to the rich who persecute them and blaspheme God. This is certainly the context here in the second chapter of James.

James goes so far as to say, astonishingly, that it was the poor that God chose to be rich in faith! This flies in the face of the corrupt American gospel of prosperity. According to James it was the poor man

who was rich in faith. It was not the rich man who had faith. The rich were painted throughout James as villains, thieves, and cheaters. He said their money would burn their flesh like fire.

It makes me wonder what motivates Christians to lay down their lives at the altar of money and material success? I can make a guess. Is it a lack of faith in God? According to James it is the poor who are rich in faith. It is not those with successful careers and phony security in the bank who are rich in faith.

Am I against working? Of course not. I am against working for money! Instead, whatever we do, we should work for the Lord Jesus Christ and not for ourselves. (**Colossians 3:23**). Work is a platform, or a pulpit, for showing Christ through our lives, and don't forget our words as well. Do not be ashamed to share the gospel of Jesus Christ when the opportunity arises.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He shed his blood for the remission of our sins. He was buried in a tomb. He was resurrected three days later. He will return again to this earth at a definite point in the future. His arrival will be an actual event just like his resurrection was an actual event which took place in earth's history.

This return of the Lord Jesus is the blessed hope of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2:6-9

In James we have some coverage on issues of favoritism and partiality. These ideas, in my opinion, are closely related to nepotism and equality. When we talk about this it is important to put it into a real world context. Let's think about how these ideas affect group dynamics in a work situation, a family, or in a church.

When these attributes control the decisions of leadership it leads to a toxic environment and a lot of hostility in the workplace or in a church.

James discussed partiality toward the rich while dismissing the poor. You can feel the anger in James' rebuke toward favoritism in the church especially between the rich and the poor.

In the scenario described by James the members of the church showed preferential treatment toward those in their fellowship who had money. He mentioned the clothes people wore as symbolic of financial status.

Nothing has changed in 2,000 years since this letter was written. Human nature is still the same, and is just as rampant in ministries and churches as it is in the secular workplace. Actually, I think it is might be more flaunted in churches and ministries. I've suffered from this in the secular workplace, but it is usually less obvious.

Nepotism is when a coworker is shown preference because he is a family member or relative of the boss. The reason it is grievous is because it is not only a promotion or more money which is at stake. The stakes are much higher in ministry because you have the souls of people under your care who are negatively affected. This is a devastating way Satan attacks ministries.

Equality is an ideal, much like communism, which people look to for guidance, but the practical application ends up causing harm and destruction in every direction.

Idealism should not replace biblical definitions and roles or social chaos will result. We see this in modern American life, politics, and culture.

Pray as God's wrath comes we will find grace and mercy to hide us until the disasters are passed over.

2:10-13

I've heard people use James to justify salvation by works. They also promote sanctification by striving to follow the ten commandments. People in cults do this. What distinguishes the the biblical gospel from cult gospels? Cult gospels stress working for salvation. The emphasis of the biblical gospel is on God's free gift of salvation through faith in the completed work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What these work and law promoters overlook is this verse in James. If we keep the entirety of God's law and yet fail in one point then we are guilty of breaking all of it. If you covet then you break all the laws which tell you not to murder, lie, commit adultery, or honor your parents. If we fail in one point of God's law then we break all the laws. This is seen in the life of David in the story about Bathsheba.

The truth is this: no one can keep God's law perfectly. There is only one man who ever kept the law of God perfectly. His name was Jesus and he died for our sins. He was buried and rose again three days later.

We are all guilty under God's law. The purpose of God's law is to bring us to a place where we stop defending ourselves but instead humble ourselves before God. **Romans 3:19-20**, *"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."*

If we cannot be justified or saved by striving to obey God's law then how are we saved and what part does "works" play in the life of the Christian?

We are saved by faith in Christ Jesus. This is all that is necessary for salvation. We are justified by faith in the finished, completed work of Jesus Christ. Read **Romans 10:9-10**.

However, the problem is that many people think they "believe" when in reality they do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, they believe in doctrines, but they do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a religious deception people fall into.

It is to the religious people James said, "You think you believe in God? The devil believes in God too!"

The question James put before us is this: what is the evidence of saving faith? Saving faith has a result or effect. It changes the believer. God's word, mixed with faith, results in a change in the believer. There will be an outpouring of good works. There will be sincerity, love, and concern for others.

It is unfortunate that deceivers use James to build a doctrine of salvation by works, or salvation by following God's law. It is sad because in this same book James said if we break one of God's laws we broke them all. We are guilty and once we have sinned we cannot cancel that sin by good works. Good works do not cancel out previous crimes. Try to do that in a human court of law. Common sense tells us good works do not remove previous crimes. We are still responsible for our previous crimes unless someone takes our place.

Someone has taken our place! Jesus took our place and God's wrath against our sins was extinguished by the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can benefit from this by putting your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Read **Acts 16:30-31**.

2:14-17

James addressed the problem of talking about faith, or making a profession of faith, but having no evidence of good works in our life which testifies to this intellectual agreement.

This becomes a real problem in religious communities. Churches can become places where people are pew warmers. They attend meetings and listen to preaching but there is no change in their lives. This is the problem James addresses here.

Do not make the mistake of interpreting these passages as saying that James believes in salvation by works. He is teaching us, rather, that real faith produces action. Real faith produces good works.

He gave an example of good works. There were people in the church who needed material help. Should you say "God bless you" but not give them any practical help? This passage addresses the problem of talking about faith but doing nothing practical to help people, especially people in the church who are in need.

May the Lord help us not to turn our back on people who are in need, especially people who are in our church and are obviously in need of help.

2:18-20

Here is the heart of the letter of James. Practical application of spiritual life. Faith is expressed through good works. People twist these scriptures in James to say we are saved by good works. James did not say this. He said that real faith will produce good works. We see this in **Ephesians 2:8-10**.

Faith produces action. Faith produces good fruit. Faith produces a practical testimony of love for God and love for neighbor. Intellectual faith, however, does not produce anything but striving over words. Intellectual faith will have a man go to church on a regular basis but never do any good. A man can be religious and not have an ounce of saving faith which produces good works. This is what James warned us about in this letter.

James introduced a startling thought. Devils believe in God. But devils will never be saved or produce good fruit. Their nature is evil, corrupt, sin, and death. They will never have any good works. If they pretend to do good works it is for the purpose of deception. Their works bring death. Yet they believe in God. Only foolish men claim not to believe in God. Even God's sworn enemies believe in him, but

foolish men claim God does not exist. Even devils do not claim God does not exist. They know God exists and they tremble.

People claim to believe in God but their faith is not saving faith. Those with saving faith humble themselves at the foot of Calvary and allow Jesus Christ to be the Lord of their life. He is the vine, and they are the branches. They abide in him and produce the fruit of God's kingdom.

Christ died for our sins. He was buried, and he rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

2:21-26

The letter of James is Jewish. It is written to early Jewish Christian believers in Jesus. They were saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, but in every way they were also Jews. James used examples that would grab Jewish minded people. He talked about how Abraham's faith led to practical obedience. His faith was completed by his obedience to God. His works proved he had real faith in the Lord.

When James said that a man was justified not only by faith but also by works he did not mean we are saved by good works. He meant that works was evidence that we have been saved. Faith that does not produce anything good cannot be called saving faith. The devils believe in God but it does not produce saving faith or a faith which produces anything good.

This is how we can evaluate our lives. Ask yourself if your faith in God is real, or is it just an intellectual exercise. It is easy to fall into the trap of making faith a way of mentally categorizing doctrines of morality. Faith is more than doctrine and morality. Faith produces the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Faith must be in God's Son, Jesus Christ, or it will not produce good fruit. Our faith must be firmly anchored in Christ alone. If we allow faith to wander to programs, people, philosophy, or any world religion, then our faith will not produce the works of God in us. Instead, it will produce self-worship and the fruit of death.

Have faith in God, Jesus said. Turn away from self, sin, the world, and the devil and put your faith in Jesus only. Then you will discover that your life will produce good works and those good works will last because they are built on the solid foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3

3:1

In other translations the word "masters" is "teachers". Some take this to mean we should avoid becoming Sunday School teachers, or we should avoid the responsibility of instructing people in the word of God.

I don't think that is the correct interpretation. Jesus commanded us to go into all the world and teach others to obey him. Jesus taught us to share the good news of the gospel. Instead, what was pointed out here was the great responsibility we have when we share the gospel.

Years ago I heard about a youth pastor in a church who had a sick child. The man could not afford to get medical help, so he resorted to stealing money from the church to help his child. He was caught and went to prison not just because he was a thief but the judge made it clear he gave the man a harsh punishment because he was also a youth pastor at a church. I think this points to the meaning of what James 3:1 is getting at.

Those who share the gospel are held to a higher standard even by the world and unbelievers. Faith in God and the Bible are mocked by the world because those who represent him fall into public sin.

A Christian represents the Lord Jesus Christ. We should not only preach the gospel, but also live the gospel when no one is watching. Our lives should be above reproach. If there is anything in my life that would cause reproach then I need to pray and ask God for complete deliverance from it. Repent of idolatry, cast down every stronghold, drive out all unbelief, fear, and doubt.

3:2-4

James taught that we offend by our words. If we are unable to offend others by our words we would be perfect. What James was referring to was when we say things that are untrue, exaggerated, or just wrong. It is easy to do. I have caught myself at times speaking in front of others and becoming dramatic for effect or to get a reaction from people. This is a stumbling block.

When we speak anything but the truth we become stumbling blocks. We can do this intentionally or accidentally. I hope in my case it was an accident, but when we do speak wrong it shows what is in our heart. Our heart is not as clean and true as we thought. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

It is also possible to not only speak wrong but speak in a wrong spirit or attitude. There were times when I spoke truth but I did not speak truth with an attitude of love or humility. This can also offend people. It is not enough to speak truth but we should speak the truth in love and humility.

Our lives are greatly impacted by our words. At crucial moments, it only takes one word or sentence to completely change the direction of life. This is why it is so important to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

3:5-6

It is important to be careful with what comes out of our mouth. I think this is more serious than we realize. A quote from the Lord Jesus on this subject should sober us up. Read **Matthew 12:36**.

James made the point that in the same way a tiny rudder on a big ship determines the ship's path and destination so also this little member of the body affects our life and where we end up.

The Lord taught us that what a man speaks is what he stored up in his heart. This means it is important to pay attention to what we listen to, read, watch, and meditate on. We store up good things in our heart then good things will come out of our mouth. We store up garbage in our heart then that is what will pour out of our mouth.

King David tried to tame his tongue. Read **Psalm 39:1-3**. Keeping quiet caused sorrow for David and lit a fire in his heart. He had to speak. Men are created with a tongue not just for tasting food but for speaking. Language and communication is an integral part of life. David's problem was that he refrained from saying anything good or bad.

We need to speak what is good. Our conversation needs to be filled with grace and seasoned with salt. Here are some scriptures on this subject that I have found to help me: **Psalm 19:14, Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 4:6**.

In summary, we need to be careful with words. Take the advice in Proverbs and let our words be as few as possible. (**Proverbs 10:19**).

Our words reflect what we stored up in our hearts. Pay attention to what you allow to brainwash you every day. Pay attention to the media you feed your mind on. Spend more time in God's word, listening to edifying music, and listening to good preaching. When we store up good in our hearts, then good will come out of our mouth.

3:7-8

We see a contrast between taming animals and the natural world compared to taming man's tongue. The point was that it is more difficult to tame one's tongue than it is to tame a lion or bear.

What does this tell us? It tells us our life will be greatly impacted by what we say and what comes out of our mouth. I am not in the camp with those who promote the spiritual laws of positive or negative confession. However, the Bible is clear that the tongue and what we say has impact on our life. It will determine a lot about where we end up.

But what controls the tongue? I noticed that before I was a Christian my tongue was constantly filled with curse words. The Bible says that natural man has a tongue like a snake that is filled with poison. Cursing comes easy and natural to the man who does not believe in God or know the Lord Jesus Christ. However, what happened to me after I was born again? What happened when the Holy Spirit moved in and gave me eternal life?

Almost immediately my speech patterns changed. I did not try and stop cussing. I just stopped. I no longer had a compulsion to curse or use foul language. If I did curse it was just because of a habit from years of filthy language. As time went forward from my salvation I noticed that my speech became less and less foul and filled more and more with words of praise, thanksgiving, and positive speech.

I never tamed my own tongue. But when a man is filled with the Holy Spirit he will change his speech patterns. His heart is no longer set on evil, but now the heart is set on the Lord Jesus Christ. Your tongue will follow what is in your heart. This is what the Lord Jesus said. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

It is important to guard our heart above all things. Out of the heart are the issues of life. We are to guard what goes into our ears and eyes and what we think about. We need to learn how to take captive every thought to be obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to make a decision that we will not put any

vile thing before our eyes. Let this be our prayer, "*Turn away my eyes from vanity and make me alive in your ways, oh Lord.*"

3:9-10

James pointed out the contradiction of people who say they bless God and yet turn around and curse men. He was basically showing how it is not possible to love God and hate your brother. We find this same statement in 1 John. It is a contradiction to profess love for God and yet hate people. Love for God will cause you to love people. Both love for God and love for people go hand in hand. These are, after all, the greatest commandments. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as you already love yourself.

In context James was talking about taming the tongue, which is impossible for someone who is not first of all controlled by the Holy Spirit. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. If a man's heart is controlled by idolatry, covetousness, and lust then what comes out of his mouth will be self-worship and cursing. However, if a man is filled with the Holy Spirit and his heart is set on the Lord then what comes out of his mouth will be praise to God, thanksgiving, and words of encouragement.

He spoke to the church in this letter. He says, "my brethren", so he was speaking to actual brothers in the church. He gave us a way to discern true and false brothers. People in the church who use their mouth to slander, gossip, and curse should be discerned and we need to ask the question if the profession of faith from these individuals is genuine. What does the Bible say to do if someone claims to be a brother in Christ but obviously does not live or speak like one? What do you do with a wolf in sheep's clothing?

There is a lot of wisdom for discernment in the book of James. We should pay attention to what comes from our mouth, and listen carefully to the words of people around us. What do their words say about their character and true profession?

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

3:11-12

We are compared to water and trees. If water is bitter then the source of that water is bitter. If the fruit on a tree is bad then the tree must be bad. However, when it comes to human beings we tend to miss the point. When someone is bitter and bears bad fruit we overlook this and tend to still try to believe they are something they are not. I've fallen into this trap before with people who were close to me at one time in my life. I wanted to believe the best of them because I loved them, but their life always had bad fruit. They were susceptible to lies and quick to turn their back on truth. Why did I think we were of the same family? Those who believe truth are in God's family. Those who love lies are in the devil's family. It is not anymore complicated than that. It is that simple. Those who love lies are of their father the devil. Those who love the truth are of the Lord Jesus.

James demonstrated to us how to discern. Sin always makes us want to complicate things. Sin will take away discernment. However, truth and light will make things simple and plain. There is sin and death. There is righteousness and life. There are two trees. One is the tree of life. One is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Notice the tree of knowledge is double-minded. Every person who loves

lies will be double minded. They speak with a forked tongue. They say one thing and do the opposite. They are unable to recognize the contradictions in their speech and life.

There is only one way for any of us to bear good fruit. It is to be planted completely in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we are separated from the Lord Jesus we will immediately bear bad fruit. We will have bitter water and bad fruit if we are separated from the Lord Jesus. Sin and self-worship separate us from the Lord Jesus Christ. To restore union with the Lord Jesus we must confess our sins and renounce our sins. **1 John 1:9** promises us that God will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Self-worship means that we believe we provide for ourselves and protect ourselves. We agree with the world system and have no faith in God as our provider and protector. This is self worship. The entire world system is based on self worship.

Turn away from self, sin, the world, and the devil. Turn your heart toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Call on his name. Confess your sins to him and ask him to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Pray and ask the Lord to unite your heart that you may walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Christ died for our sins. He was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

3:13-14

Here we have a contrast again. The contrast is between wisdom and bitterness. This is a pattern we see in James, and indeed, this contrast goes all through the Bible all the way from Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Lot and Abraham, Saul and David, Israel and Judah.. it goes on and on. What is God trying to teach us?

A man who has true faith will produce a life in agreement with that reality. A man who is only religious and has no real faith in the Lord Jesus will produce the same fruit as the world system. We need to be careful to discern between true spiritual life and dead religion. The greatest snare for people is not knowing the difference between religion and true spiritual life in Christ. It goes back to the choice between the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Life is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Abiding in Christ will produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit Paul listed for us in **Galatians 5**. However, if we are unbelieving our life will produce bitter envying, strife, and lying. We will make a profession, but our profession will be a lie because we do not believe what we are saying. We do not agree with the truth, but we agree with the lie.

Agreement with God or God's enemy is the basic difference. Adam and Eve knew the truth of God's word. The word of the Lord walked with them and they had a relationship with him. However, when the serpent showed up they quickly abandoned their faith in the word of God and agreed with the word of the serpent. The result was death, darkness, and destruction ever since.

A wise man will have a good conversation. His lifestyle will reflect his wisdom. People who are deceived may intellectually go along with truth, but in their heart they worship their own self. A wise man will produce good fruit. A wise man will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. A wise man will fear the Lord and walk in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Renounce all other gods, philosophies, programs, and systems. Abandon this world system and flee to the only one who can save you: the Lord Jesus Christ.

3:15-18

Many years ago I had a friend who started reading Christian counseling books. These books were manuals on reinterpreting secular concepts of psychiatry into Christian terminology. I always compare this to eating sugar coated poison. My friend already had a predisposition towards position and pride, and so was easily tempted by the concepts in the books he was reading.

The concepts in these books were just repackaged paganism. One sentence or phrase he started repeating was this: "*all truth is God's truth*". That sounded like a wise proverb, but the more I watched his life and the effects of his "Christian" counseling books on his ministry the more I came to believe that his proverb was a deception. *All truth is **NOT** God's truth.*

These scriptures in James provide a biblical framework for thinking and believing in contrast to my friend's psychological framework. Not all "wisdom" comes from God. Some wisdom comes from the devil. You can tell the difference by the results. The fruit of God's wisdom is purity, peace, gentleness, mercy. The devil's wisdom leads to envy, strife, and confusion.

The end result of my friend was he eventually left the ministry. He served as a Pastor for several years, but eventually he was back on the streets on drugs again. The last time I heard from him he called me from prison. Did those books on Christian counseling get him there? I'm not suggesting that but it was a symptom of his spirit which was not satisfied with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He needed something more than what the Bible had to give him.

Beware of adding secular concepts and ideas to the gospel. Beware of adding systems, steps, and philosophy to the gospel. What we fill our hearts with determines the outcome of our lives. We need to feed our spirit on the pure word of God and leave the psychology to unbelievers.

Chapter 4

4:1-3

Wars have a spiritual origin. James taught us that war and fighting come from a spiritual origin. It comes from lust that wars within us. All outward violence and wars come out of the heart of men. Read **Matthew 15:19**. Nations can come up with different reasons for making war but this is the real reason. It is because of lust in the heart of greedy, selfish people.

James said we could just pray and ask God for things but God doesn't answer prayers if the motive is lust. If we are asking for something because of covetousness in our heart then God will not answer that prayer.

Most of what is taught in the prosperity gospel is based on human covetousness and greed. They teach they can have wealth if they claim it from God, but James contradicted this false teaching. James taught

us if we pray and have lust in our hearts then God is not going to answer those prayers. Why should he? See also **1 Timothy 6:8-10 and Proverbs 11:4**.

4:4

It is possible to make oneself an enemy of God and not be aware of it. All you have to do is love the world.

Which brings up the question: what is the world? What is this "world" the scripture speaks about here.

The outward machinery of the world is government, business, and society. The inner spirit of this machinery is the pride of life, the lust of the eyes, and the lust of the flesh. Read **1 John 2:15-16**.

The Lord Jesus made a difference between the outward machinery of the world and the inward evil spirit of the world system when he prayed to the heavenly Father. Read **John 17:15**. Jesus showed there is a world system everyone lives in. He does not pray for his Father to take them out of the world system of government, business, and society. But he did pray the Father keep them from the evil of the world system: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

To love the world system is to esteem government, business, and society over the Lord. When we love the world we put our trust in government, business, or society.

When our daily work is more important and more valuable than our relationship with God then we have become an enemy of God. A friend to the world is an enemy of God.

We live in this system but we are forbidden to love this system which sets itself up against the kingdom of God. Everything in this world system is controlled behind the scenes by the devil and his minions. Read **Ephesians 6:12**.

This world system is not the kingdom of God. Jesus made that clear. His kingdom is different from this present world system we are living in. This world system is based on position, power, and pride. The kingdom of God is the exact opposite which Jesus taught his disciples multiple times.

The love of the world is injected into us at a young age. We are taught that our goal in life is to grow up and "make a name" for ourselves. This is the evil which was exposed at the tower of Babel. This is the same evil which Jesus exposed when he made the demons possessing the man in the Gadarenes expose their name "legion". The world is set up according to names and numbers. You see this pattern everywhere, in government, business, and society.

To accomplish anything in the world system you have to establish a name for yourself, and then you add power to your name through numbers. Those numbers are people and money. This is the way of the devil. Promotion of one's name and building power and influence through numbers.

If you read the Bible carefully you will see God does the exact opposite of this. He always chooses those who have no names, those who are humble, lowly, and of no account. He then accomplishes his purpose through either one man, or through small groups of people who have no strength in themselves. This pattern is seen repeatedly in the history of Israel and in the church.

Why are those who are friends of the world called adulterers? God views love of the world system as complete betrayal of the kingdom of God. When we dedicate ourselves to promoting our own name or business for the sake of creating money (power, influence), then we have in practical terms betrayed the kingdom of God. The only way to escape this is to do everything for the glory of God. We can't just say we are working for Jesus. We must do this in a real and practical way. We must live in a humble and self denying way.

The Christian can still be a businessman but he must be consecrated to the Lord. His work is done for the Lord and not for himself or others. Read **Colossians 3:23**. Work and business is to be used as a platform and opportunity for the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any other purpose is for self-interest and love of self and love of the world system.

4:5

When I was a brand new Christian in 1989 I was a resident in a Christian residential program. After I surrendered my heart to the Lord Jesus I was filled with the Holy Spirit. I experienced things which I thought everyone experienced but eventually found out what happened to me was not business as usual for Christians.

Some nights the Lord Jesus stood at the foot of my bed and I could just feel waves of God's love for me. It was overwhelming. I would cry myself to sleep many nights.

I could hear God speak to me sometimes. One time he spoke to me this bible verse reference. He simply said to me, "*James 4:5*"

I looked up this bible verse and did not understand what it meant. I think I originally looked this up in the NIV bible which did not help matters.

Over time and meditating on this verse I understand it a little better.

Some of the words seem to have a negative meaning. The words envy and lusteth seem to have a negative meaning. However, in the context of what is being said here, "*lusteth to envy*" means a passionate and intense protective feeling. The Holy Spirit who lives in me watches over me with an intense protective feeling.

The Lord watches our lives intensely. I think this is more true for some people or some people can feel the intensity of God's gaze more than others. This sense of feeling God's gaze is another way of describing the fear of the Lord. It causes a person to live much differently.

It makes you care about what God thinks of you.

When I was in high school my parents put my sister and I into a private school for one year. During that year I had a history teacher who was a Christian. Because he was a Christian he cared about his students as individuals. I could feel that concern from him and when I learned he was having a Bible study I would show up. After awhile I was the only student who showed up for these Bible studies. As a result of the personal attention I got from this teacher I made straight A's in his class. Most of my other

classes I failed or got low grades. I hated school. But because this teacher knew my name and I had a personal friendship with him I made perfect grades in his class.

This explains to me what this means. The Lord knows my name. His Spirit lives inside of me and his Spirit is intensely protective of me. He wants me to love the Lord with all of my heart and utterly forsake everything that is in the world system.

The Holy Spirit lives in me. He has shown me that the Lord Jesus knows my name. I heard him call my name. He called me "Mike" which at the time I heard him say this name I did not commonly go by that name. I was called "Mack" by people for many years. But the Lord spoke to me and he said, "Mike". Ever since then I've tried to ask people to call me "Mike" and not "Mack" anymore.

The Lord knows me. He is intensely protective of me. As a result I try my best to please him and learn all the lessons in his classroom.

4:6

Here is a principle seen in the Bible: God opposes the proud. The man controlled by pride is an enemy of God. Pride is the chief character quality of Satan, the enemy of God, and those who follow pride are followers of the devil.

How can we identify pride? In America an easy way to spot pride is just listen to people talk about themselves. They boast about how much they love themselves. This reeks of pride and self-centered living. Living this way leads a person deeper into darkness and deception.

We often think of pride as a cartoon character walking around with his nose in the air. However, this is only a caricature of pride. The biblical definition of pride is loving self, exalting self, and promoting one's own name and self. It is not surprising that websites which give people the tools to promote self are popular. Websites like Facebook are so popular because they tap into the darkest and most powerful of Satan's temptations: pride. Self-love defines American culture.

The Lord opposes people who exalt themselves. America has been in the business of exalting self for quite a while. We export pride along with every kind of perversion all over the world. Americans think it is life's goal to make a name for themselves and to bring a lot of people underneath their name. This is not just in business but is rampant in churches as well.

God opposes the proud. All of this pride will be brought down to the pit.

On the other side of this is an encouraging word: God gives grace to the humble. To those who deny self and refuse to promote their name God gives grace. He shows mercy and grace to those who humble their hearts and do not live for self.

Turn away from living for self. Ask God to deliver you from the snare of pride and self exaltation. Turn away from that darkness and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart.

4:7

Even before I was a Christian I had heard of the devil. I saw enough already that I knew there was evil in some people. I felt at times some force moving in me which made me think, say, and do things which were bizarre. I might chalk it up to just being crazy except for the fact that when I got saved I changed immediately. I know without a doubt the dramatic change which took place in my life at salvation was proof that I had been infested with demons.

What causes a man to get messed up with evil spirits? It starts with rebellion against God. When you exalt yourself against God and live according to pride then you are in the devil's camp. The enemy will move in to your life and wreck havoc.

The way to get the devil out is the opposite of how you let him in. Instead of rebelling against God you need to submit yourself to God. You need to lay down your opinions, thoughts, or beliefs and take God's Word as absolute truth. When you do I promise the devil will flee from you. It doesn't mean he won't try to tempt you back again, but he will flee when you submit yourself to God and resist him.

This is basic spiritual warfare. Submission to God puts us underneath God's protection. When we take our life back into our own hands we remove ourselves from God's protection.

I think of this like an umbrella. As long as you stay under God's umbrella of protection then you don't get wet with darkness and sin. However, when you decide to go out from underneath the umbrella you are immediately hit with the rain of the devil's temptations. It is automatic. It doesn't matter if you believe it or not. It doesn't matter if you agree with this or not. This is just how it is, plain and simple.

If you want God to protect you, then you have to submit to him and come underneath his Word for protection. You need to learn how to obey, follow, and submit to the truth of God's word. This is a basic lesson about spiritual warfare, and if you can't do this there is little hope you will ever find freedom from demons, addictions, and bondage.

The willingness to humble ourselves before God is the first step. After this, there is a lot to learn about what God has done for us through the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is through the knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ that we find consistent victory over the power of the devil. We cannot overcome in our strength, but we can find victory through an increasing knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Stay in the word. Stay in prayer. Make a decision to humble yourself, deny yourself, and be glad when God corrects you through scripture and through other people. A willingness to be corrected goes along with having a humble heart.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

4:8-10

Here is an amazing promise from the Lord. This is one of the most precious promises I think I have ever found. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. When I cry out to the Lord in sincerity, and

humility, and repentance... He hears! And he not only hears but he draws near to anyone who cries out to him. I know this from experience but beyond my experience I have God's word which never changes.

There were some desperate times in my life when there was no where else to turn. Those are good places to be in. It is like the account of Israel standing between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. Nowhere to go except God. God then makes a way for us where there was no way. He creates a road in front of our feet.

Here I am again in this place where no one can help me but the Lord. I think the Lord likes bringing me into these places where my entire focus is on him and his promises.

Do we know what it means "he will draw near to you"? I have had a taste of this, and it is the sweetest thing one can ever taste. In his presence there is fullness of joy. I know this. I'm not speaking theory. It is a fact. There is no joy like touching the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no love like feeling the love of Jesus for you. It is like a warm blanket on a cold, winter morning. It is like feeling the sun rising on your face. It is like the awe and inspiration of standing on the highest mountain peak and looking at miles and miles of world beneath your feet. There is no comparison to being in the presence of Jesus.

Draw near to God. He will draw near to you. What else do you need?

4:11-12

It is important to the Lord that we be careful with what we say about other people. The number one thing about the enemy which sets him apart is his tongue and mouth. He speaks evil and accuses people. We see this clearly in the book of Job that the devil makes accusations against the saints. He accuses God to the saints and he accuses the saints to God. His purpose is to drive a wedge between God and man, and in part he was successful, but the Lord Jesus brought us back to God. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Because of what the Lord Jesus accomplished through his death, burial, and resurrection the enemy's accusations carry no legal weight against us. We can plead the blood of the Lamb against every accusation of the enemy.

Do not imitate the devil by speaking evil about people. When we gossip or slander then we are walking in the footsteps of the devil. We think, somehow, that the law of God does not apply to us when we point a finger at someone else. But we are not above the law. When we accuse someone else we are witnessing against ourselves that we know right and wrong. But are we able to keep the law? No, we fail, and if we have shown no mercy to others, then will mercy be shown to us? If we have not forgiven others then will our sins be forgiven?

The Lord sees everything that is good or evil. We should look for the good in people and not the evil. We should look to encourage people instead of tearing them down. There is a place for biblical correction, but remember to do everything in love. Is confrontation and correction motivated by love and a desire to help the person? If so, then the person will barely even know they were corrected by you.

Let us, therefore, determine that we will not speak evil but instead we will look for the good in brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us use our mouth to edify, exhort, build up, and comfort the church.

4:13-16

These verses confront the attitude of thinking we are in control of our lives. We make plans and do things without taking any consideration of what God's plan are and what the Lord wants us to do. We think that we have all the time in the world to do what we want to do with our lives, but here James shows us that our lives are actually short in duration. We should try to find out what God's will is for us instead of going about living life like we are the ones in control. What does God want us to do? What is God's plan for us?

These verses also reveal that the heart of men is naturally set on making money. However, this is not the true purpose and goal of the Christian. It should never be the goal of the Christian to make money and to succeed in the world system. If that is the goal then we are no different than unbelievers. Instead, in whatever we do, we should do it for the glory of God and for furthering the gospel. Work is our platform to share the gospel and influence people for God. After all, we are the salt of the earth and we are the light of the world. Our goal is different from the unbeliever. The unbeliever's only goal is self: providing for self, protecting self, and worshiping himself. This is the goal of every unbeliever. Are you living like this? Is your only goal in life yourself? Then you are not a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus said if anyone will come after him he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him.

These verses remind us of how short life is. We should make it our priority to invest time and energy into what will truly count for eternity. Read, study, memorize, and meditate on God's word. Put God's word into practice in your life. Love one another. Love the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. Do all you can, while you still can, to bring glory to God and build the body of Christ.

4:17

This should put the nail in the coffin for those who believe that people are basically "good". The Bible declares that men are sinners. We are born in sin, participate in sin, and swim in a system that is based on the principle of sin. There is no hope of knowing anything different except sin. Even the little we know to do good, if we fail to do it, we commit sin. Not only do you sin when you miss the mark through breaking God's laws, but you also sin when you know what you should do and fail to do it. This is the sin of negligence.

This verse convinces me there is no hope except through the blood of the Lamb. It is only through the completed, finished work of the Lord Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection that I have any hope of righteousness. There is no righteousness to be found by striving to obey God's law. There is only condemnation, guilt, and regret in that direction.

The only hope is to put our faith in the goodness of God displayed through the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

This shows us that avoiding sin is not good enough. We must actively be engaged in doing what is right. We need to put off sin. But we also must put on what is good. Paul describes this in **Ephesians 4:22-24**.

The Christian life is about putting off "the old man", being renewed "in the spirit of your mind", and then putting on "the new man". This process begins, proceeds, and ends by putting our faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ through his death, burial, and resurrection. This is also described as the process of justification, sanctification, and glorification. We were saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. This affects our spirit, our soul, and our body. Read **1 Thessalonians 5:23**.

We are completely helpless to do the right thing in our own strength. Without the power of the Holy Spirit we can never produce good works in our life. We need to ask God everyday to fill us with the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who will enable us to do the right thing at the right time. We are created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared for us beforehand to walk in them. Walk in agreement with the Lord, humble yourself under his correction and pruning, and pray that God will produce the fruit of his kingdom in and through the life which he gave you.

Chapter 5

5:1-6

James charges full force at rich men. Why? What is going on here? If you listen to modern American preachers they will surely find a way to explain these verses away as not meaning what it plainly says. Rich men: weep and how for misery that is coming? Remember the story that Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus? Why is the rich man in hell? Why did Jesus say it is nearly impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God? We should pause a moment and think about this. Some people cannot bring themselves to consider the implications of these verses because their heart is so set on covetousness, greed, and self worship. They cannot stop to think about what having riches says about a person's values and character.

Rich people are not put in a good light. There are a lot of other places in the Bible where riches are an indication of the wrath of God on a person's life. Go through the Bible and look at what it says about money and riches, and do not listen to modern American preachers who twist scriptures regarding prosperity. Even preachers that I respect I have heard get this wrong. It is difficult to understand what the Bible says about money in our modern day era because so many people are already rich. They do not want to put themselves in the same category as what James is talking about.

It is the poor who are rich in faith. Not the rich. The rich are condemned in the Bible. The poor and humble are exalted.

Do you have a lot of money? You would do well to start finding a way to give it away as fast as you can. Give it to support the preaching of the gospel. Give it to the poor. Give it to whatever good cause you can find, but do not hoard it or keep it. Do not put your trust in money or wealth. Put your trust in God and give your money away to people who are using it for the kingdom or to people who desperately need your help.

5:7-9

I had a friend when I was a young Christian who had a hard time believing in the return of the Lord. I could tell he had not read the entire New Testament, because you can't go through a book of the New

Testament without being confronted with the return of the Lord. From the gospels all the way through Revelation the return of the Lord is taught. It is the blessed hope of the church. Read Titus 2:13.

The return of the Lord is closer now than when James wrote "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh". We are closer now than any other generation to the return of the Lord.

This fact of the sudden appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ is to inspire hope and encouragement for the church. It is also a purifying truth for when we set our hearts on it and meditate on this we will live a pure and holy life. **1 John 3:2-3**, *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."*

We are exhorted to set our mind on the return of the Lord and live in view of the return of the Lord. This is basic Christian living. Don't waste your life following false idols of money, position, and pleasure. Instead, invest your life in what is eternal. A big part of this is cultivating a fear of the Lord and a constant expectant attitude of his return.

Sadly most of what is heard from American pulpits is self-centered. Decide to focus on the truths which pertain to the Lord Jesus Christ, and one of the greatest truths is his return. How should this affect our daily lives? Do we ever pause in our day to wonder if this could be the day the Lord returns?

Matthew 24:44-51 give us a good framework for developing a fear of God and an attitude of expecting his soon return.

5:10-11

Several things I learn from these verses. We are to consider the prophets in scripture. Prophets were not only prophets but what they said, but also their life testimony was a message from God. What God in them, to them, and through them is all part of being a prophet. We are to look at their lives, as well as their words. He specifically mentions Job in this context so we know as well that the Bible considers Job as a prophet. How was he a prophet? His life story was a message from God. God testifies through the life history and account of the man Job.

How is my life a story for God? Does my life bring glory to God? Am I strong in faith and give glory to God? Do my trials and problems cause me to cast away my confidence in the Lord? Or do I go from strength to strength and faith to faith giving honor and glory to God?

After all the trials were over God rewarded Job's faith and patience. All the Lord wants from us is to trust in him and be patient. At the right time the Lord will lift us up and reward us for our faith and patience. Our part is to stand firm and not be moved away from what God's word says to us. Read **Ephesians 6:13**.

5:12

This is why people protest "swearing" in a court of law by placing a hand on a Bible and saying "I do solemnly swear". If I'm not mistaken I think this is now changed where people say "I affirm" instead of "I swear".

Be a man of your word. When you say something always tell the truth and mean what you say. Do not say something and then change your mind. When someone asks you a question let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" mean "no". Live such a life of integrity that people will not have to guess if you are telling the truth or lying.

This comes down to a life of integrity and being a man who stands by his word. Don't say something you don't mean. Don't exaggerate. Don't boast. Don't make any promises that you cannot keep.

There is a lot in James which deals with our speech. We are not to use the tongue for lying, swearing, gossip, tearing down other people, or saying something we do not believe. James teaches us to have correct speech in life.

Make sure your words are in agreement with the truth. The only way we can do this is to soak our hearts and minds in the truth of scripture.

5:13-15

I've seen these verses applied in different ways. I've been in churches where people came to the front of the church at the end of a service and elders anointed people with oil and prayed for them. I'm not sure if that was the right application of this verse but I've seen it done that way.

We should pray for people who are sick. Without a doubt Jesus healed the sick. As his followers we should pray for the sick. The Lord is able to heal people and deliver them from afflictions and sickness. We should always have an attitude of faith that God can and does heal people who are sick. Don't dismiss the supernatural and miraculous work of God.

Notice healing takes place within the context of church. There is a need for believers to gather, pray, and minister to one another. We are called to help edify the church.

Christians are not always happy. People suffer from afflictions and sickness. Trials, problems, and suffering are a normal part of the Christian life. The Lord overcame death, hell, and the grave. How much easier is it for him to heal our sickness?

Do not assume if you are not healed it is because of a lack of faith. Some people teach that if do not have a certain quality or quantity of faith then you are not healed. This is NOT always the case. There are examples of a lack of faith hindering Jesus from healing people. However, this is not always the case. Do not assume this about a brother or sister in Christ. It is uncharitable to make assumptions about the relationship other people have with God. Remember Job's friends made a lot of false assumptions about Job and were rebuked by God.

Healing should be taught in the church. Many churches never teach this and do not give any place in the church service for this. We need to teach about God's healing and also make this available for people within a church service.

5:16-18

This verse does not give Catholic priests the right to listen to anyone's confession. Read it again. Confess your faults "one to another". This is not talking about one man listening to the confessions of people. It is Christians bearing the burdens of one another, praying for one another, and for healing.

Elijah the prophet was mentioned. He was mentioned as an example of prevailing prayer. He prayed and God responded by sending a drought on Israel. When Elijah prayed again the Lord sent rain. This was an example of the power of praying to God. Nothing is too difficult for the Lord. The Lord is not limited. The only thing which is limited is our faith in God.

These verses show us that Elijah was not a super saint. He was a man just like us. He prayed and the Lord heard him. We can also pray, like Elijah, and the Lord will hear our prayers.

What am I praying for? I am praying for big changes in my life. The Lord is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that I could ever ask or think.

5:19-20

These final verses point to our responsibility to evangelize and bring people to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is one of the highest privileges in life to lead someone to the Lord. To be part of that process of planting God's word and seeing those seeds bear fruit in the salvation of a soul is an amazing thing to experience.

How do we convert someone? Some think we should to be like the world in order to convert people to Christ. This has never made much sense to me. Why would someone in the world convert to being a Christian if the Christian is no different than the world? What is there to convert to?

Notice that there is a "way" which is in error. The way of error is unbelief. When we do not believe in the Bible or the Lord Jesus then our life will be in error. We will live in darkness when we do not believe in the Lord.

To convert someone from unbelief, then, is to cover a multitude of sins. They can find forgiveness for sin and also that person will never get into all the sin they would have otherwise. Stopping one person will have a ripple effect. That person is no longer influencing others toward sin and unbelief but will become an agent of righteousness.

May the Lord help us to win souls for him. **He who wins souls is wise.**

Mike Kines
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